

## ABSTRACTS

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### **To Begin at the Beginning Again: Žižek in Yugoslavia**

SEAN HOMER

This article situates Slavoj Žižek in relation to his formative intellectual and political context in Yugoslavia, a context all too frequently ignored in the Anglo-American appropriation of his work. Through an analysis of Žižek's positions on immigration, the NATO bombing of Serbia, party politics, and violence, Homer argues that a consistent pattern emerges in Žižek's politics of adopting radical and provocative positions abroad while simultaneously maintaining conservative positions at home. Homer also addresses the irony of Žižek's Leninist turn, as he was a central figure in the "demarxification" of Slovene theoretical discourse in the mid-1980s. In opposition to Žižek's view of Marxism as a *formalism* without specific content, Homer argues that a left strategy today requires us also to argue *for* something. Finally, Homer considers Žižek's writings on violence, arguing that this is a route the radical left has taken once before in the 1970s; it was disastrous then and will prove so again today.

### **The Rhetorics of Interpretation and Žižek's Approach to Film**

MARIO SLUGAN

In this article I argue for criteria in evaluating the persuasiveness of interpretative work: propositional factuality, argumentative validity and conceptual coherence. With the above criteria in mind I analyze Slavoj Žižek's work on film—overall rhetorical strategy employed, film theories supported and interpretative work undertaken. I demonstrate that Žižek's film theory is plagued by hasty generalizations and inaccurate formal analyses which make it fail to compete with its main rival—cognitivism. I point to the conceptual incoherence of the key philosophical term Žižek near-ubiquitously resorts to in his interpretative work—the Real. Finally, the identification of repetition as a key rhetorical strategy allows me to dismiss numerous interpretative and theoretical claims Žižek bases on a limited set of fixed examples by demonstrating that their descriptions are factually incorrect.

### **The Menon-Žižek Debate: "The Tale of the (Never-marked) (But secretly coded) Universal and the (Always marked) Particular . . ."**

GAUTAM BASU THAKUR

On occasion of his first lecture tour of India in 2010, Žižek sparked off a debate with Nivedita Menon, a leading postcolonial feminist scholar. The debate revolves around Menon's contention that Žižek's emphasis on European, Christian Universalism as the most proactive model for countering capitalism is ignorant of the heteroglossiac postcolonial histories of South Asia. Menon's response ("The Two Žižeks") suggests that what Žižek appears to be missing is knowledge of the fallibility of Eurocentric discourses in negotiating the colonial and postcolonial situations particular to the subcontinent. Though

*Slavic Review* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013)

Žižek's debates with Badiou and Butler are well known, few outside India are aware of the Menon-Žižek debate. This paper will occasion this little known debate to consider some of the major points raised by Menon against the applicability of Žižek's theoretical arguments toward reading and understanding postcolonial politics and culture.

### **Law and Empire in Late Tsarist Russia: Muslim Tatars Go to Court**

STEFAN B. KIRMSE

This article combines an investigation of legal practice in late tsarist Russia with an analysis of imperial rule. The Judicial Reform of 1864 introduced new legal principles, institutions, and rules of court procedure into the empire. Focusing on legal interaction in the newly established circuit courts in Crimea and Kazan, this article explores the implications of Tatar legal involvement in state courts for both the empire's legal reform process and its policies toward ethnic and religious minorities. It discusses the courts as tools for the integration of these multiethnic regions with the imperial center and shows how legal unification developed in a context of dynamic, and locally specific, plural legal orders. It concludes that minority policies were characterized by the simultaneous pursuit of integration and the promotion of difference. The article draws mainly on court records from Kazan and Simferopol (Crimea), newspaper coverage, and on the reports and memoirs of jurists.

### **Too Much of a Good Thing? Assessing Access to Civil Justice in Russia**

KATHRYN HENDLEY

Kathryn Hendley argues that easy access to the civil courts in Russia is a deliberate policy choice aimed at countering the popular image of courts as hopelessly corrupt and incompetent that is propagated by the media. Judicial officials present judges as heroically struggling to cope with the deluge of cases in a timely fashion. Relying on field work and analysis of caseload data, Hendley shows that the burden on trial-level Russian judges has been exaggerated for effect. She documents the procedural mechanisms available to facilitate rapid turnaround of simple cases. She argues that the flood of cases could easily be stanching by increasing filing fees, but that judicial officials cling to the open door policy as a way of proving the value of the courts. Rather than discouraging the demand for courts, they prefer to tinker with the supply side of the equation.

### **Adapting the Therapeutic Discourse to Post-Soviet Media Culture: The Case of *Modnyi Prigovor***

JULIA LERNER and CLAUDIA ZBENOVICH

In this article we present a close reading of the discursive media transformation generated by "Fashion Verdict"—a makeover reality show broadcast on Russian TV. Our analysis reveals that the adopted genre of therapeutic culture constitutes a new mode of talk about personal experience in the post-Soviet media, a mode based on pop-psychological assumptions and linked to the

discursive practice of psychotherapy. However, we show that in post-Soviet popular culture the global therapeutic talking culture encounters powerful cultural counterparts. Apart from psychotherapy, the TV courtroom transformation works by shifting three other discursive frames of articulation of individual and personal life: communist Comrades' Court, soviet Kitchen Talk, and glamorous Fashion Show. Combining an anthropological approach with conversational and frame analysis, we decipher how the familiar discursive forms of talking about personal life domesticate the therapeutic discourse in the Russian communicative culture: they pave the way for its acceptance and concomitantly contest and possibly undermine the ideas that the therapeutic culture brings in.